

## Excellence In Partnerships Award

### ***THE FRIENDS OF RAYSTOWN LAKE***

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**T**he Friends of Raystown Lake is an innovative volunteer organization whose members strive to not only improve recreational opportunities for Raystown Lake visitors but vibrantly support environmental stewardship initiatives. Founded in 1996, the Friends of Raystown Lake is a non-profit organization and Corps of Engineers Cooperative Association whose mission is to promote the responsible stewardship of the natural and recreational resources of Raystown Lake through the support of members and constituents in sponsoring and developing programs in education, resource protection and enhancement, and recreational improvement. The past two years provide a glimpse of the passion the Friends of Raystown has for the Raystown Lake Project. All of the actions described below are through selfless service to the Corps of Engineers; to ensure they are building a stronger Raystown Lake Project for tomorrow.

### **Criteria 1: Creativity and Originality**

It doesn't take long for anyone to see that tents have the glow of television and children are engrossed in their Nintendo DS. For a long time, the Friends felt the challenge to not only actively engage our youth in nature, but, more importantly to educate them on their impact to the surrounding natural resources and their responsibility to conserve them. The Friends supported our desire to strengthen youngsters interests in science so that they one day may instill that passion in future generations. Just a few short years ago, innovative thinking led to the creation of the Raystown Conservation Education Partnership (RayCEP).

One is most likely thinking the RayCEP program should be highlighted under Public Education; however, no other program can match RayCEP in pure creativity and originality. In short, RayCEP is a consortium of federal and state agencies, private business, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations that provide financial and material support so *student interns* can present a wide variety of environmental programs. Total outreach is the element that sets this program apart from other interpretive programs. RayCEP interns take the Corps stewardship mission to the visitors by conducting programs about turtles on the swim beaches and testing water quality on public tour boats. Over the past two years alone, the RayCEP interns touched the lives of over 8,000 people on natural resource awareness at nearly 250 programs. Through each one of the individuals reached, the Friends and the Corps are one person closer to realizing the goal of developing future scientists and creating a community that has a greater understanding of nature.

### **Criteria 2: Improvements in Public Awareness**

Perhaps one of the greatest examples of promoting public awareness for sustainable resources is the Annual Lake Cleanup Day. Working with Raystown staff, the Friends took a hard look at an existing program that focused primarily on recruiting volunteers. After a dedicated effort, the event was completely refocused to center on the message of achieving environmental sustainability. Members now work during this event to train our community's attention to the difference that one person can make – that one bottle, one can, one bag of trash at a time will add up to a big difference. During the event, Friends members are working side by side with Corps staff in cultivating an environmental ethic in youth and reminding adult community members of the impact that we have on our resources and on the importance of maintaining a healthy, diverse environment. To the Friends, the glory at the end of the event is more than the great feeling of teamwork and accomplishment that is seen in the collection of a large pile of trash: it is about the education of recycling and its impact on future generations and our environment.

### **❖ Criteria 3: Public Education**

As previously described, the RayCEP program, touched over 8,000 participants, and is the Friend's flagship public education program. However, the Friends public education endeavors reach beyond RayCEP. Recently the Friends, through a partnership with the American Chestnut Foundation, supported the development of a local American Chestnut Foundation Branch to raise awareness of the historic loss and exciting restoration of the majestic and ecologically valuable tree. This is a strong educational message that helps visitors understand the significance of threats to our natural resources and how science and volunteers can bring back a functionally extinct species. The Friend's recent sponsorship of an educational event helped generate over \$19,000 for the restoration of the historically significant tree. Additionally, the Friends wanted members of the community and our youth to have an opportunity to understand the importance of this restoration endeavor to our environment and cultural heritage. Half of the Friends support was memberships donated to six different school districts. Each high school and middle school library in these districts will receive educational material, journals, and newsletters.

### **❖ Criteria 4: Accomplishment of Management Objectives**

It goes without saying that the Friends play a vital role accomplishing management objectives and completing work items that surely would not have happened without their support. The Friends contributed from their financial assets and applied for grant money to provide the fiscal resources needed to support and implement various objectives. Two Friends programs noted below highlight, very simply, their steadfast support.

Through the Hardwood Forestry Fund, the Friends secured the planting of over 7,000 advanced growth trees for long-term forest regeneration and 11,000 mast producing seedlings in addition to treating hundreds of acres of invasive species. Together with the Corps, the Friends are in the final stages of successfully implementing three grants for a total value exceeding \$58,000. The Friends receipt of these grants not only saved critical project funds during trying fiscal times, but also helped to complete several more aspects of our stewardship goals. The Friends, again in response to the need for assistance, partnered with the Pennsylvania Mountain Service Corps to host an AmeriCorps employee to support Raystown's wildlife and forest management programs. Since its initiation at Raystown Lake, eight AmeriCorps members whose positions have no direct cost to the Corps, contributed over 13,600 volunteer hours worth nearly a quarter million dollars. In 2009, the Friends AmeriCorps service member assisted the project forester in accomplishing numerous forest management objectives. In addition, this Friends sponsored position provided sole support to the projects nuisance goose monitoring, nest treatment, and deterrent programs to meet U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requirements and project objectives under Federal permits.

### **❖ Criteria 5: Involving Other Partners**

As detailed throughout each of the other criteria described within, the Friends and the Corps are successful together because they continue to seek out and engage a host of other partners in the community. Through the Friends and each one of their programs, all partners involved better understand the role that Raystown Lake and the Corps is serving our nation.

### **❖ Criteria 6: Serving Diverse Audiences**

Undoubtedly their largest undertaking yet, the Friends, recognizing the changing desires of the recreating public, embarked with Raystown staff upon a mission to add mountain biking and trail

running to Raystown Lake's boating and camping destination image. Through sheer persistence, the Friends combined the right mix of creativity and innovation to secure federal funding not otherwise available to the Raystown Lake Project. They then supplemented these funds with state and local grants to provide the financial support needed to make this trail project grow from a dream into a reality. Through their unique collaboration with ten federal, state, and local partner organizations, the Friends coordinated an environmental assessment, managed multiple contracts, and entered into a real estate instrument with the Corps to manage and operate the trail system. The whole project, however, is much more than that. The Friends engaged the Raystown community and surrounding regions through hundreds of volunteers and thousands of hours to build a trail system that embraces each aspect of the Corps mission in environmental sustainability. In 2009, after seven years of dedicated efforts, the Friends opened the \$750,000 trail project with a grand celebration. Overall, the 32- mile single track trail system is unique in the eastern United States and has prominently placed the Raystown Lake Project on the national mountain biking scene. The Huntingdon County Visitors Bureau and the Southern Alleghenies Planning & Development Commission state that the Allegrippis Trails System is already one of the top tourism draws to Huntingdon County.

#### **Criteria 7: The Unspoken**

By themselves, the high profile programs and achievements noted above are impressive and demonstrate the power of an excellent partnership organization. However, it is when you add them to the other labor intensive, "routine tasks" that you attain a level of selfless service to the public that is second to none. Therefore, without hesitation, the addition of a final criterion was necessary, that being one that identified those tasks that are often left "unspoken". This includes the Friend's enthusiasm for the Water Safety Float in the local Halloween Parade, with many members marching for miles proudly wearing their lifejackets. This means the publication of quarterly newsletter that provides not only a constant awareness of the Friends' programs, but more often what we, the Corps of Engineers, are doing at Raystown Lake. The public is kept aware of our missions and many activities through their information releases. This means strengthening ongoing programs such as the solar powered lake navigation lights that each night provide safe travel for our boaters. The burden of cost, maintenance, and replacement is one they bear. Finally, this means the Friends' support in events such as the Wheelin' Sportsmen's Program, which provides a day of hunting for persons with disabilities. Although their support may be small, it is significant. This activity would no doubt occur without the Friends, however, their involvement in programs such as this that makes them the success that they are.

#### ***In Closing:***

During difficult times it is sometimes hard to see the forest for the trees, but in the Friends of Raystown's case it's hard not to see the support they have provided to Corps and their service to the public. Their creativity and innovation in partnership initiatives, their understanding of visitor wants and needs, their awareness and unwavering support of our mission, and their passion for the Raystown community have allowed the Friends and the Corps to achieve a balance in both recreation enhancements and environmental stewardship. Through each one of their programs, the Friends' tireless efforts continue to ensure that, together with the Corps, the Raystown Lake Project will thrive in the future. The staff of Raystown is proud to nominate an organization whose strength, persistence, and sound conservation ethic dominates the partnership landscape. The Friends of Raystown Lake is a true partner in excellence.

The Friends of Raystown Lake

*~ Working Together Today to Build a Stronger Raystown for Tomorrow ~*



## Support Documentation

It is often said that a single picture can speak a thousand words. The articles and photographs provided below are but a glimpse at our attempt to speak to the passion, commitment, and excellence in which the Friends of Raystown have made a difference at the Raystown Lake Project and to the Corps of Engineers.

### Article 1

#### TWO CENTS ON RAYSTOWN

Dear Dirt Rag,

I just wanted to add my two cents regarding the Allegrippis Trail system you highlighted in issue #143.

During a recent vacation with the family, I planned to include some biking. This was a must, since I was scheduled for surgery on my arm when we returned home. I initially intended to make a trip to French Creek State Park for some riding, but then after receiving my copy of the IMBA Trail News, which also highlighted the trails in Raystown Lake, I shortened our stay...sorry Yogi! In French Creek I experienced some typical Pennsylvania trails (rocks, rocks and more rocks!). The trails were dry, fun and in good condition, but not even close to the trails near Raystown Lake.

The trail system is excellent...fast...flowing...a blast! I spent several hours exploring, tacking on the miles, meeting people from all over (hikers, dogs and bikers who all were enjoying their time on the trails as well) and I hated to



leave.

The hard work put into these trails is a testament to the fact that quality and sustainable trails are possible. We need to drag the multitude of so-called land

managers (by their ears) through these trails and maybe, just maybe, they will see the light.

All I have to say to your readers is... go! Plan a trip now! The campground is immediately adjacent to the trailhead...you can't beat it!

I just had to share this...now it's time to go under the knife and screw up my riding season.

P.S. Thanks for all of your hard work and the great mag!

Chris Mierke  
Kirtland, OH

Chris, and anyone else looking for a good vacation spot,

Check out this issue's Access column for another story about people coming together to fill a need for more quality trails, this time in the Georgia-North Carolina area. -Ed.

### The Allegrippis Trails System

**Article 1:** Published September 2009, Dirt Rag Magazine.

**Article 2:** Published September 2009, Men's Journal

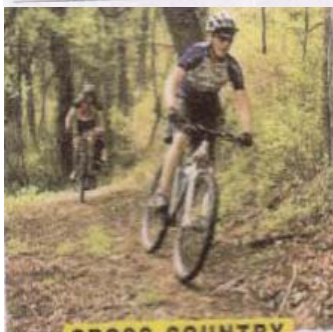
**Photo 1:** Mountain biker Evan Gross, a dedicated volunteer who continues to work with the Friends on the sustainable trails, stands next to a trail head sign.

### NOTEBOOK /

### Article 2

## THE 4 BEST BIKE TRAILS

Fall is the perfect season to hit the dirt on knobby tires. Here are the top new spots to open up this year.



### CROSS-COUNTRY

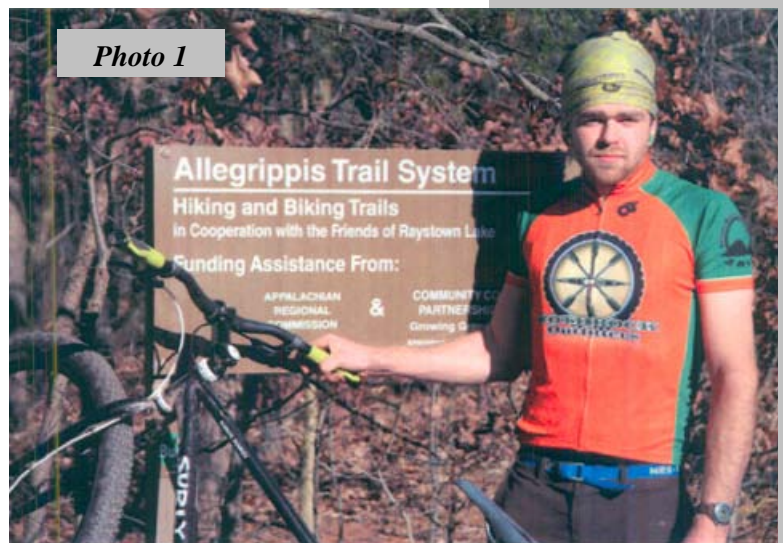
#### ALLEGRIPPIS TRAIL SYSTEM

Huntingdon, Pennsylvania

The trail is 32 miles of concentric loops designed to offer rides of varying length and difficulty.

Much of the trail system is a perfect mash-up of all the quintessential elements of East Coast riding: swooping single-track through pine forest; pump-track-style rollers on soft, sticky soil; and long, grinding climbs. Make sure to hit the descent down Hydro, which slices through the hardwoods all the way to an ideal view of Raystown Lake (free; [allegrippistrails.com](http://allegrippistrails.com)).

### Photo 1



Allegrippis trails quite popular since grand opening in mid May

**Allegrippis trails** raystown lake

**Article 3 (above):** Headline published, August 2009, in the Daily News.

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**Photo 1**



**Photo 2**



**Photo 3**



**Photo 4**



**Photo 5**



**Photo 6**



**Photo 7**

## **The Friends of Raystown Annual Lake Cleanup Day and RayCEP Partnership**

Someone once said “Tell me, I forget; Show me, I remember, Involve me, and I understand.”

Few better words could describe the goal of both the Friends Annual Lake Cleanup Day and RayCEP programs. The photographs to the left demonstrate the very heart and soul of the Friends of Raystown Lake; volunteers in guided action, making a difference in the youth, families, and community at OUR Project; spreading the mission and message of the Corps of Engineers.

**Photo 1:** A volunteer helps to unload litter collected during the Cleanup Day event.

**Photo 2:** Young volunteers are taught about recycling and participate in separating all recyclable materials collected.

**Photo 3:** A small portion of the Cleanup Day group stands with Corps Members in the midst of the material collected; proud of the difference they are helping to make.

**Photo 4 & 5:** Youth are educated through the RayCEP program on bald eagles that inhabit Raystown Lake; gaining awareness in the importance of resource conservation.

**Photo 6 & 7:** Through two different RayCEP programs; youth are actively engaged in learning about habitat and sustainable resources.





*Photo 1*

## AmeriCorps

**Photo 1:** 2009 AmeriCorps member Jake Mazzei, works under Corps supervision to collect the fruits from the Raystown American Chestnut Orchard trees, another project supported by the Friends of Raystown Lake. Jake's position sponsored in part by the Friends Lake and other partners, provided over 620 volunteer hours, with a service value exceeding \$12,500.

## The Hardwood Forestry Fund



*Photo 2*



*Photo 3*

**Photo 2:** Standing as a reminder at the entrance to a forested area, the sign reminds all that the Friends receipt of over \$14,000 from 2 separate Hardwood Forestry Fund Grants has allowed necessary forest management to be completed; while allowing for Raystown Staff members to utilize project funding in other projects.

## Additional Friends Activities



*Photo 4*

**Photo 3 & 4:** Friends Members march with Corps Members reminding the community of water safety.

The Friends of Raystown Lake

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**Photo 1**

## Additional Activities

**~Continued~**

**Photo 1:** The Friends are responsible for the placement of solar powered navigation lights which aid in night travel on the lake.

**Photo 2 & 3:** Support for Raystown's artificial fish structure placement program by the Friends has led to over 1,000 structures being placed in Raystown Lake to benefit the aquatic environment.



**Photo 2**



**Photo 3**

## Selfless Service

Embodying the spirit of the Army's Selfless Service Value, Friends members have given a precious gift to the Raystown Project, their time, their service, their dedication.



**Photo 4**



**Photo 5**



**Photo 6**

**Photos 4, 5, & 6:** Friends Members receive the diamond award for volunteer service at various meetings & events. Nine Friends of Raystown Lake members have received our highest award recognizing 500 volunteer hours.

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